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A  
DISCOURSE  
ON THE  
INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICE, &c.

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INSTRUMENT



A  
DISCOURSE

ON THE  
INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICE  
UPON OUR  
INQUIRIES AFTER TRUTH.

WITH AN  
APPENDIX

ADDRESSED TO  
THE REV. Mr. BELSHAM.

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*By Edward Williams.*

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*He that doeth truth cometh to the Light. JESUS CHRIST.  
But there is a Spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Al-  
mighty giveth them understanding. ELIHU.*

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DISCOVER

INFLUENCE OF THE

BOOK

INQUIRIES AFTER TRUTH

WITH A

APPENDIX



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## A SERMON, &c.

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JOHN vii. 17.

*If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*

**W**HAT unspeakable obligations, my brethren, are we laid under, while we enjoy a divine revelation! How desirable such a revelation is, not only the deplorable state of the heathen world, the range of abominable idolatries, but also our own consciences, if impartially consulted, will testify. And the words I have now read seem to take it for granted, as indubitable, that mankind not only need,

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but have room to expect, a supernatural doctrine from God. In no period of time hath God left himself without witness, in this respect. And while we adore the sovereign limitations with which it has been, at times, dispensed, we have great reason to bless the goodness which, in more than one period, hath made it universal.—But how interesting and solemn the thought, that it is a very possible case, (I speak not of professed infidels) a very possible case that some at least, of a christian audience may be *ever learning*, and yet may *never come to the knowledge of the truth*. It would not be amiss for each of us to turn upon himself with holy jealousy, and say: “O my soul, is it *possible* that a christian professor should frequent holy assemblies and ordinances, should live and die with the bible in his hands, without knowing what it most concerns him to know?” Would to God it were but merely possible, and not a frequent reality. With deep concern we observe, that though men are informed of the most important doctrines revealed



revealed from heaven, of promises the most precious and encouraging, threatenings infinitely tremendous, and precepts the most wise and good, some will neither believe, repent, nor obey. The fact cannot be denied, however little it is lamented.

It is worthy of remark, that ignorance and disaffection, with respect to the real doctrines of Christianity, may be found not only in persons of very different acquirements and situations in life; but, what is more remarkable, in persons, the faces of whose *moral* characters are extremely dissimilar. Not only Pharisees and Sadducees, clashing theologists, and persons espousing jarring systems of philosophy, have missed to find the *pearl of great price*; but some of exemplary external conduct, of amiable tempers, of reputed virtue, benevolence, and charity, as well as the licentious, the perverse, the dissolute and unpretending.

May we not advance a step further—

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and say, that it is not impossible, nor perhaps uncommon, for *inquisitive* persons to fail of success? For, in order to obtain the prize, to *strive* is not enough, except we strive *lawfully*. Do we anxiously and importunately surround the temple of heavenly truth seeking admittance? Be it known to us, that the appointed avenue is the *fear of the Lord*: *My son — if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the FEAR OF THE LORD, and, by that means, find the improved knowledge of God.* With this restriction, and in this order, *ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. — If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine.*

In direct opposition to this appointed mode of seeking truth, a sentiment has been lately advanced, which, in proportion as it prevails, is of alarming consequence. It is this: "The men who  
" are

“ are most indifferent to the practice of  
 “ religion — will ever be the first — to  
 “ embrace a rational system of faith \*.”  
 — But if this remark be just, how came  
 the jewish doctors and rulers to reject so  
 rational a system as the gospel? Not,  
 surely, because they were overstocked with  
 “ religious practice.” But they had their  
 prejudices in favour of *superstition*! Grant-  
 ed: but the question still returns, whence  
 came they to be so prejudiced against rea-  
 son, wisdom, and goodness? Why so quar-  
 rel

\* Mr. BELSHAM's Discourse on The Importance of  
 Truth, preached at the Old-Jewry to the Supporters of  
 the New College at Hackney. The passage more at large  
 is as follows: “ Rational Christians indeed are often repre-  
 sented as indifferent to practical religion—it may perhaps  
 be admitted, that there has been some plausible ground  
 for the accusation. The men who are *most indifferent to  
 the practice of religion*, and whose minds therefore are least  
 attached to any set of principles, will ever be the first  
 to see the absurdities of a popular superstition, and to  
 embrace a rational system of faith. But not being pro-  
 perly influenced by it, their irregular conduct will for  
 a time [ how long? ] disgrace their principles. But truth  
 will gradually make its way by its *natural energy*, and  
 will in the end rise superior to every prejudice. Prac-  
 tical believers will at length open their eyes [were they  
 practical



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rel with the light of day, and the mirrors of holiness? Were any people under heaven favoured like them, as to religious principles and means of knowledge? How then came the sublime discoveries of revelation, with which they were daily conversant, to be less operative than superstition? Yes, had they been possessed but of the smallest degree of genuine habitual goodness, and the exercise of *real virtue*,  
their

practical believers *before* their eyes were opened?] and feeling the benign influence of just and generous principles, they will demonstrate the excellence of their faith by the superior dignity and worth of their character." (p. 32. Second Edit.) What a reflection is here implied on the most eminent reformers of every age; who were "the first to see the absurdities of a popular superstition" and the falsity of reigning principles! What a poor compliment to the *religious character* of unitarian reformers! According to this account, one might be tempted to ask:—Was it by being "indifferent to the practice of religion" that Mr. B. was qualified to see and pronounce Calvinism to be "*gloomy and erroneous, an unamiable and melancholy system?*" Charity forbids us to think that he was *thus* qualified; and if so, by his own rule, he is no very competent judge: except he is pleased to adopt the alternative, that he is only the humble follower of more *sagacious* but *irreligious* guides.



their superstitions would no more have been able to prevent their attractions to Christ, his miracles and doctrine, than the intervention of the moon will prevent the gravitating tendency of the earth to the sun.

From the Jews let us turn to the Gentiles. How came the philosophic Greeks to reckon that foolishness which heaven pronounces wisdom? Was not this the grand cause, *that, when they knew God they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened? professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.* What has been, is now; and I suppose will continue to be while human nature continues in a state of trial. Mankind is in vain stunned with the proofs of miracles, or dazzled with the collected rays of evidence, while they remain indifferent to the performance of moral and religious duties. Those things, glorious as they are, can influence only as moral means. And what are means without a disposition  
to

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to improve them? *Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it? \* If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine.*

When our Lord spoke these words, as he taught in the temple during the feast of tabernacles, the Jews were in a ferment of differing thoughts about him. *Some said, He is a good man : others said, Nay ; but he deceiveth the people.* His meek and unassuming deportment, joined with his sublime instructions and incontestible miracles, presented to them a paradox. The more they reflected upon it, the more they were confounded. One part of his character was utterly incompatible with that of the blustering and conquering hero they expected for their Messiah ; while the other part shone irresistibly bright and convincing. Attending to the uncommon things he advanced, and probably his peculiar manner of teaching, *the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?* That is, having

\* *Prov. xvii. 16.*

having never had a liberal education, which usually precedes such knowledge and address? To this our Lord replies: *My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.* What I teach claims a higher origin than you are willing to allow it. But to be thoroughly and profitably satisfied of this, he gives them to understand that they are to pay greater attention to the *will of God* in plainer matters. The disobedient is neither qualified to pass a judgment on what I teach, nor do I give him any promise of success. *Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double minded.* Expel prejudice from your minds, and impurity from your conduct. While unfaithful and disobedient in what you profess, how can you expect an additional talent? If prodigal of past favours, and blind to your true interest, you are not qualified to judge of heavenly wisdom. If you attended more to the practice of religion, according to the means granted you, most assuredly you could not be so much at a loss. Your scruples concerning me and my doctrine spring from your

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vices,



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vices, your pride and hypocrisy. Whereas he who is truly teachable, cultivating a steady and tender regard to the mind of heaven in other things, may soon be resolved. For *if any man will* (is deliberately resolved to) *do his will, he shall know of the doctrine.*

What I mean to advance from these words, is:—That of all men they are most likely, other things being equal, to *know* the true scheme of revealed religion, and, by parity of reason, the most important parts of it, who are most desirous and resolved to *do the will of God*; that is, to reduce what they know already to conscientious useful practice.—In suberviency to this design, I shall offer some remarks on the *will* of God, which is here proposed as a primary object of our attention; and then consider what is required of us in reference to this primary object, here called the *doing* of it, as the appointed medium of improvement in religious knowledge; finally, I shall endeavour to examine, with a degree of strictness, the *influence* of religious practice



tice on theological enquiries. When these points have been discussed, I hope the *modern sentiment* before mentioned will appear sufficiently futile\*.

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I. Let

\* To some, indeed, the attempt of a publick refutation of it may seem unnecessary. And this would be the case, were we not, like the Athenians of old, addicted to idle speculations; seeking after *new* things rather than *solid*; and to substitute any fancy, under the venerable name of TRUTH, in place of a vigorous exertion in the field of duty. Sacred term! Where is the folly, however extravagant, which thou hast not been compelled to serve? Yes, to find, and to boast that we have found, what we imagine has escaped the notice of the great and little vulgar, is far easier, and more flattering to our vanity, than assiduously to discharge the plain and substantial duties of religion.

We are liable to extremes on every side. Sometimes, an overstrained attachment to a few favourite branches of *morality*, slackens our regard to others of equal if not superior moment; or, if our moral system is more comprehensive, we are tempted to forget the importance of certain principles which demand our cordial *belief*. At other times, the *reciprocal* influence of principles and practice is unobserved, or too much neglected. One while, we are inclined to think there is *no* connection between them; and another while, that they operate *mechanically*, and not as moral means. But of all our excentric opinions respecting knowledge and practice, I hardly know any one more singular, or of more pernicious tendency, (especially to *theological students*) than that which I am now opposing.

Candor

I. Let our first attention be confined to some general remarks on the *will* of God; which is here proposed to us as an object of leading consideration, and with which

Candor and justice forbid that we should ascribe to any intentions which they disavow. I would not, therefore, be understood to insinuate, that the gentleman to whose sentiments I allude, *intended* by them to discountenance practical piety and devotion, and to compliment "indifference to religious practice" as possessed of superior excellence. Nevertheless, while we avoid imputing to the author of an opinion a bad design, it is but fair, and it may be useful, to examine its genuine tendency.

Let us suppose that a young *student in divinity* thoroughly imbibes the above sentiment, and acts according to it. He will of course look up to *religious indifference* as the school of sagacity; what proceeds from *that* quarter will be deemed more *rational* in religion, than what comes from *servant piety* and zealous exertion. The next step in this hopeful path, is to *associate* with these sons of indifference, for the sake of improving by their sage observations. Now as the *example* of those we admire is contagious, himself also very probably will become "indifferent to religious practice." In due time he is called to settle over a people. He surveys his flock, and looks up with deference to the *least practical* of them for their judgment on any controverted point, and esteems it great happiness to enjoy their intimate acquaintance. The humble, the devout, the zealous, will be shunned; and

which our compliance is demanded. Jehovah's will is the supreme law, to which all men (and I may add, all intelligent creatures) are bound to be *strictly* conformed, under the awful penalty of his *displeasure* †. It is not, however, the same to all beings, with respect to the particulars

and they, in their turn, will shun him; his religious performances, fifty to one, will be thinly attended; the *practical* Christians are under the painful necessity of looking out for another minister; a division ensues; this, on the one hand, is ascribed to orthodox bigotry, and justified, on the other, by a respect to soundness in the faith and practical godliness. — And what now remains, but that he justify his principles and conduct by calling the seceding party *enthusiasts*, and his own *rational Christians*? — If the divine hand over-rule such confusions for final good, no thanks to those by whom *offences* come.

† This sentiment, which is demonstrably essential to all rational views of the divine government, Mr. B. seems to discard; where he classes it among some of the most hideous views of the supreme Being that ever entered into the human mind: “Let those whose feelings have dictated what they dare not avow — that the formidable chimera of their imaginations, to which they have annexed the name of God the Father, was a merciless tyrant — who were secretly wishing — that the reins of universal government were in better hands; — who, with aching hearts, have viewed an omnipotent God, marking with a jealous and inexorable eye, *every instance*



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ticulars of its requirements; but, while it admits not the least moral obliquity, is adapted to their respective *natures*. This follows

*of human frailty and folly* — let such — declare the satisfaction they felt when brought out of this darkness into marvellous light." (p. 33.) The creature whose character answers to the first part of this description is certainly much to be pitied; and if ever he *change* his views, it will be hardly *possible* for him to do it for the worse. To him a *single ray* of light must needs appear marvellous, and the *smallest grain* of hope must administer high satisfaction.

But why join with these extravagances God's "marking with a jealous eye every instance of human *frailty and folly*?" These *frailties*, and *follies*, must of necessity be either *right*, or *wrong*; there is in them either a breach of obligation, or there is not; if there is not, what need of an *apology*, and why *misname* them; but if there is — if every deviation from right reason, every act, sentiment, and disposition not conformable to the strictness of truth, is *wrong* — is it not *right* that God should treat them *as such*; and is it not incompatible with *infinite truth* that he should treat them otherwise? If these things (no matter what they are called) are wrong, they are *punishable*; for to say that a thing is not punishable, in an accountable agent, is the same as to say that it is not wrong, and therefore right. And surely any degree of punishment from an omnipotent hand ought to be *dreaded*. *I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him.* To say that great wrongs are punishable, but smaller ones not at all, is an insult to reason.



follows as a self-evident truth, except we should hold that the duties of an angel are required of a child. Nor are its obligations various with respect to different species only; for innumerable circumstances, with respect to beings of the same class, will constitute a diversity of obligations. Natural capacity, means of information, favourable opportunities, and a thousand other things, must be taken into the account. Thus the will of God concerning men differs, with respect to the clearness of its intimations, according to the times and situations in which they are placed; as either without the pale of the church, or within it; as under a less perfect, or complete economy.

The Heathens, who have no divine revelation properly so called, have only the volumes of creation, providence and conscience, in which to seek their Maker's will. Accustomed to behold only the works of God, and to hear the indistinct whispers of conscience, their conclusions concerning right and

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and wrong must needs be weak and unsteady. What direct knowledge they have is faint and confused; and as to the traditional information which any of them retain, it is so mixed with superstitions and absurdities, that it resembles rather an *ignis fatuus* which misleads, than a lamp to enlighten their path. But imperfect as this natural light is, it is not to be slighted with impunity. It is the messenger of God; its rays however weak are sacred, and therefore to resist them must be criminal.

The church of God was differently circumstanced under every dispensation. Superadded to the dictates of nature, he hath shewed to his covenanted people *what is good, and what he requires of them*. His manner of instructing them, though various, carried its own evidence that it was divine; and upon this strength of evidence, concerning things about which nature was silent, their obligation to obey was founded. During the earlier ages revealed truths were few, but remarkably comprehensive. The longevity of the patriarchs,

triarchs, and their traditional knowledge of important facts, sufficiently justify the wisdom of this procedure. Nor was the divine will imparted to them so very sparingly as we may at first imagine. Of the original rectitude and foul apostacy of our first parents; the promise of a deliverer from evil; the translation of Enoch; and the universal deluge; of God's distinguished favour to Noah; his promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with the most remarkable incidents in their respective families — of *these* things none could be ignorant, before they were recorded by Moses. Nor is it at all unlikely, that oral tradition had preserved some instructive circumstances of these facts, which divine wisdom thought fit afterwards to conceal. However, in the earliest ages they had precious promises as the foundation of their hopes; and some rules, beside what is common to all men, to direct their worship and conduct. From the time of Moses to that of Malachi, the door of heaven, if I may so express myself, was seldom shut. The light of truth, from age to

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age,



age, shone with increasing brightness. By accumulated miracles, and the remarkable fulfilment of various prophecies, preceding revelations became more manifest, both as to their reality and their import. Consequently, the will of God was made more plain to them in proportion. Their sacred books were multiplied. Hence, by comparing scripture with scripture, they had growing advantages to ascertain the meaning of the several parts, and the leading design of the whole.

Under the *christian* dispensation the eternal God has revealed his will in a manner still more plain and ample. *In the latter days*, at the close of the Mosaic and the commencement of the christian economy, *he hath spoken to us by his Son*. Truths hidden from former ages are *brought to light by the gospel*. Here we have contained, and displayed at large, the plan of redemption; the government and grace of God, and the eternal designation of man. Here the person and offices of the long expected deliverer, his fulness of grace, and his universal

versal dominion, are fully exhibited. Here the aids and consolations of the Holy Spirit of promise are made known explicitly. In the New Testament are promises and threatenings, life and death, or, in its own peculiarly strong language, salvation and damnation, not only announced, but also pressed upon our consciences by every consideration that is awful and engaging. What striking displays have we of the glories of heaven, and the terrors of hell, in connection with the infinite perfections of Jehovah and our endless existence!—It is natural to ask, What meaneth all this? To what end has the great Jehovah been so peculiarly indulgent to the children of men? Why has he sent forth prophets and wise men, rising up early and going with their lives at stake to warn their fellow sinners? Why has he from age to age raised up holy persons to speak the words of truth and soberness as they were moved by the Holy Ghost? How comes the eternal Father to say, that he is not ashamed to call himself *our God*, and to prepare for us a city? To what purpose did the Son

of God, being made flesh, dwell among us, and afterwards humble himself as low as the cursed death of the cross? And, finally, why are we favoured with the promise of an infallible director to shew us *the way, the truth and the life*? All these wonderful discoveries concerning man, concur to fix his attention to the *will* of God, that by *doing* it, he *may do well for himself*.

When I speak of the *plainness* of gospel truths, I would not be supposed to mean, that nothing connected with our future happiness is left under a veil. No; some things are but occasionally hinted at, which yet in a sense are very important. This remark is peculiarly applicable to the difficulty we find in accounting for the intimate nature, the manner of being, and circumstances, of certain objects, while their existence is clearly ascertained \*. And in

\* Sicut *legi divinæ* obedire tenemur, licet reluctetur *voluntas*, ita et *verbo Dei* fidem habere, licet reluctetur *ratio*. Etenim, si ea duntaxat credamus quæ sunt rationi nostræ consentanea, *rebus* assentimur, non *auctori*. BACON, *De Augm. Scient.*



in this respect the imperfection of our knowledge of divine things, bears a striking analogy to our difficulties in accounting for numberless appearances in the natural world. An inspired apostle was obliged to say, that he knew but *in part*, and saw but *through a glass, darkly*. Thus whether we turn our views to the spiritual or natural world, a degree of obscurity awaits us. And why should this fact be deemed a hardship? Is not perfection in knowledge the exclusive prerogative of Deity? Whereas man is a creature of very limited powers in his best estate; and through sin still more so. In the present world both these causes, in a greater or less degree, operate jointly to confine our knowledge within very narrow bounds. While our capacity is but small, compared with the extent of knowables, our understanding is also darkened through our having lost, and not fully recovered, the *life of God*. The one kind of imperfection is to follow us through every stage of existence, but from the other all the righteous may assuredly expect complete deliverance

ance. However they may labour under perplexing and humbling uncertainties, respecting the precise will of their heavenly Father in some other particulars, of this they are certain, that it is both his purpose and pleasure to *give them the kingdom*. They are confident, that the prayer of their High Priest was accepted, and will in due time be answered: *Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.*— In short, the curtain which conceals from us what is not proper for us to know, is at the same time well fitted to *hide pride from man*. And we should be cautious not to confound the reserves of sovereignty with our own criminal defects. Of this, however, we may be assured, that truths of essential importance to human happiness are so fully revealed, that there can be no danger of mistaking them but from a culpable depravity of heart.— Having given this brief account of the will of God as made known to mankind, that is, the means he hath afforded them of knowing it as the very first object of their concern,

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as accountable creatures ; let us next consider,

II. What is required of them, and of us particularly, in reference to this object? *If any man will do his will.* Whatever is meant by *doing*, we see that it is the instituted way to knowledge. And elsewhere it is shewn to be a necessary way to happiness. *Not every one that saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.* From what has been already said concerning men's various means of information, nothing can be plainer than that God's requirements of them must be various and proportionable. *Of him to whom much is given, much is required.* Increasing light calls for increasing diligence and circumspection. It is required of those who have no revelation, that they suitably improve the means they have ; and who will deny, that in proportion as they do this, they do God's will? But my present design is not to investigate the condition and obligations of heathens, but what God requires from us,



us, as professors of revealed religion. The field before us is large, and the time allotted for this discourse limited. Let us therefore, under this head, confine our attention to these two ideas, The receiving of promises, and the observance of moral precepts. Neglecting these, no one can be said to *do the will of God*. He who lives in a practical disregard of either of them, is not, I insist, a competent judge of the christian system, and, by parity of reason, its most interesting parts.

That the receiving of divine *promises*, whenever they are exhibited to men, constitutes an essential part of their obedience, one would hope needs no proof. On this, my brethren, is founded the justice of the divine threatenings against unbelievers, with which the scriptures abound. *Except ye believe*, saith the prophet, *ye shall not be established*. And when the evidence rises to the completeness of the gospel scheme, the penal sanction becomes more alarming : *He that believeth not shall be damned*. Is not this obligation to receive the gratuitous  
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promise, as our only way of access to God, clearly implied in those *commendations* which God himself bestows on believers? Why was Abraham signalized as the *father of the faithful*, and the *friend of God*? His high commendation was, that *he believed God* \*. And, indeed, when we consider the nature of the leading promises of revelation, it will abundantly appear, how much our believing them is not only our duty but our *privilege*. For what, my brethren, are these *exceeding great and precious promises* but the vehicles of mercy from heaven? They are good news of great joy, and the favour of eternal life. In them we behold the foundation of all human hope; and without them we have no prospect but what is discouraging. Without the mercy they convey we are bound over to despair. We have nothing left but the *fearful looking for of judgment*

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\* Si attente rem perpendamus, dignius quidnam est credere, quam scire, qualiter nunc scimus. In scientia enim mens humana patitur a sensu, qui a rebus materiatis resilit; in fide autem anima patitur ab anima, quæ est agens dignius. BACON, *Ibid.*

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*and fiery indignation. By reason of sin we are all exposed to punishment with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power\*.*

In such a helpless and forlorn condition does the righteous Governor of the world find all the children of men. He saw them on the precipice of ruin, careless, nay rebellious. He viewed the human system deranged, and verging towards endless perdition. But sovereign benevolence interposed. Divine mercy, suggested by essential goodness, and directed by unerring wisdom, presents to us a Saviour who is Christ the Lord. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.* Here every one who believes with the heart, finds a refreshing spring. *The eyes of his understanding being enlightened, that he may know what is the hope of his calling*

\* 2 Theff. i. 9



calling, he beholds a scene blessed and transporting. His hope begins to bud and blossom. The joy of the Lord becomes his strength; he rejoices with joy unspeakable and full of glory, and yet with trembling. Now his repentings are kindled together on account of his transgressions; he commiserates a disobedient world; he pours out supplications on their account from the abundance of his benevolent affections, and thinks no sacrifice too great to promote their eternal welfare. *The love of Christ constraineth him, because he thus judges, that if one died for all then were all dead.* If the lamp of his devotion languishes, he has access by faith to the inexhaustible promise for the sacred oil. Refreshed and affected with the view of infinite benignity and love, the spontaneous language of his heart is; *O give thanks unto the Lord for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever. Ob that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!*

To every true believer of the promise Christ is precious. The spirit of the pro-

mises, as of the prophetic writings, is the testimony they bear to Jesus. In him prophecies and promises all center; by him they were fulfilled and ratified. On his mediatorial work the ministry of reconciliation is founded. *For God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Other foundation of hope, righteousness, and holiness; of true religion and eternal life, can no man lay than that which is laid in Zion, Jesus Christ.* One grand design of Christ's mission was to bear witness to the promise: *Jesus answered, To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto THE TRUTH. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice* \*. As if he had said, "For this purpose am I come in the flesh, to announce the design, to fulfil the contents, and to confirm the reality of the promise made to the fathers; every believer of the promise receiveth my message." This, I apprehend, is the genuine and direct import of the word *truth* in this place—the *fidelity* of God in

\* John xviii. 37.

in the promise\*. With this agrees that passage of St. Paul: *Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers; and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy†.* The promise was concerning spiritual redemption and eternal life in the Messiah; to testify this by his ministry and wonderful works, and to ratify it with his death, was one distinguished end of his mediatorial work. *This is the RECORD, that God hath given to us the promises of eternal life, and this life is in his son. He that believeth not God hath made*

\* The above passage is Mr. B's *Text*; on which he observes: "The Son of God tells us that to bear witness to *truth* was the chief end of his birth and mission into the world." (p. 1.) He afterwards defines the word: "*Truth* is a word of various import. It is sometimes used to express the real existence, properties, powers, connexions, and relations of things—it more frequently signifies the conformity of our ideas to the reality of things, or the conformity of our words to our ideas, of our declarations to our purposes, and of our actions to our promises." (p. 9.) Query: Is what our Lord calls *the truth* at all included in this definition?

† Rom. xv. 8, 9.



*made him a liar.* But on the contrary, he who believes the promise and record of the God of truth, *doeth his will.*

The other idea proposed, as implied in *doing the will of God*, is the observance of moral precepts. Receiving the promises, indeed, is a part of moral duty ; but the nature of the obedience in the one case and the other is so different, that the distinction, *faith and practice*, or, believing and doing, has been generally, and not improperly, admitted. But that any should carry the distinction so far as to hold, that faith in *no sense* is a duty, must surely be very incautious. Perhaps the different acceptations of the term "*faith*" may not be duly regarded. Nothing is plainer than that it signifies in the New Testament sometimes a *divine gift*, and at other times a *human duty*. The former, it is true, is essentially different from all moral obedience, and properly contrasted with it ; but the latter is a capital branch of that obedience. The one is a divine influx producing a disposition, the other is the exercise

exercise of that disposition when produced. Now the obedience which is paid to what are commonly denominated moral precepts, differs from the obedience of faith, or believing; as the *receiving* of benefits on a divine testimony, differs from a suitable *improvement* of them. Having briefly attended to the former of these, let us now advert to the latter.

What then is the observance of moral precepts? It is conformity to the rule of right. It is a compliance with the will of the righteous and holy Governor of the universe, by whatever means that will is made known, respecting things *antecedently*\* right.

\* I say *antecedently* right; for a constitution of created things being supposed, the obligation results (in *moral* as distinguished from *positive* precepts) from the constituted relations; nevertheless, more remotely, the mere will of God gave birth to that constitution itself. Prior to this, no standard of right and wrong can be assigned but the divine Essence.

The *ultimate* standard, therefore, of moral rectitude is God himself, in his infinite being and necessary perfections; the *intermediate*, his sovereign pleasure, ever conformable to himself; and the *proximate*, our appointed relation to him and other beings.

right. It is, in short, to discharge the obligations of universal justice; whereby we give to creatures what is *their* due, and to God the things that are *His*. Hence arises supreme love to God, seeing he infinitely surpasses in excellence and worthiness all competitors. It is but common justice, and plain honesty, that we should give to the God of love, the source of all moral beauty, a greater share of our affection than to any other object. All *indifference* towards him is an egregious violation of justice. Again; nothing is more just and becoming than that we should in all things submit our *wills* to that of God, and devote ourselves to the divine providence and pleasure universally. Nor is it any thing more than common justice, that we should warmly feel, and *devoutly express*, our gratitude to heaven for its innumerable benefits.

This is the voice of nature and of reason. And in perfect harmony with it is the voice of revelation: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and*  
*with*



with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment; and the second is like unto it: *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. Here lies the principle of all acceptable obedience, and the essence of all solid virtue. For the neglect of such duties, no attention to positive rites, or external forms of worship, in any age of the world, would atone. And we may add, with unabated confidence, that no scrupulous discharge of other duties, be they what they may; no self-denial, be the sacrifice ever so costly, will be *now* admitted as a substitute for *love*, supreme to God, and unfeigned to man; for *doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God*. In a word, *such* piety alone is a sufficient test of regard for truth and goodness. And I will add—that the man who lives in a state of *indifference* towards God, is an *enemy* to goodness and truth, to justice and to reason. He is condemned by the law of heaven; he is condemned by his own conscience; nay, he is condemned by the savage idolater. What! to be indifferent towards infinite benevolence and

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mercy?

mercy? It is reprobated by every feeling of humanity, by every obligation in life, as well as by the supreme Judge of all equity.

The morality of the gospel, though radically the same, is beautifully expanded into a thousand delightful forms. Permit me to give you a few specimens. *And besides all this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity\*.* Our blessed Lord hath taught us, both by precept and example, not only to cultivate meekness and lowliness of heart, earnest prayer and warmest gratitude to God, and all kind offices to friends, but also to love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, to do good to them that hate us, and pray for them who despitefully use, and persecute us†. In the New Testament every moral duty, whether personal or relative, whether incumbent on us as members of

\* 2 Pet. i. 5—7.

† Matt. v. 44.

of the church or of the state, in private or in publick life, is enjoined with wonderful plainness and brevity, and backed with the most cogent reasons. Now we exhort you brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. Rejoice evermore; pray without ceasing; in every thing give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Abstain from all appearance of evil†. With what fulness, conciseness, and pathos, does the apostle Paul exhort the Romans: Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; not slothful in business; fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one towards another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate\*. This is the sublime morality of

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† 1 Theff. v. 14, &c.      \* Rom. xii. 9, &c.



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the gospel, and which is so very imperfectly exemplified in modern times. Where do we meet with that fervor of love, that profound humility, that melting gratitude, that sweet meekness of conduct, and those disinterested exertions, which Christianity requires, and for which we have the most powerful motives? What is all scientific knowledge—whether philosophical, political, or theological—compared with such evangelical charity! *Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing as he ought to know. But if any man love God, the same is known of him* \*.

But here it may be asked, seeing the best of our *doings* are attended with much imperfection; seeing faith and love, and the required expressions of them, cannot for one day, or perhaps in one instance, bear the test of rigorous examination; what is that *smallest* degree with which is connected, according to the text, freedom  
from

\* 1 Cor. viii. 1—3.

from all essential mistakes in religious enquiries? The question is too complicated, to admit of an accurate discussion in a few words, to which I am now confined; but my answer in brief is this: The primary and fundamental qualification is the regeneration of the heart. There is not perhaps any thing uttered by the Saviour more plainly, or more solemnly, than the necessity of our being *born from above*; or, as he explains the phraseology, *born of the Spirit*. It implies a change of disposition effected by God himself. If the heart be not made *good and honest* by divine grace, for receiving the seed of truth, no fruit of holiness and virtue can be expected to spring up. *The preparations of the heart in man are from the Lord*. If from the tree you expect good fruit, let the tree itself be made good.—But does not this account tend to retard our diligence in the use of means? Not in the least; but rather to quicken it. Drawing us to pray, it draws us unto God. This is God's appointed plan; he tells us of  
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our impotency, that under a humbling sense of it we may seek his grace; and this keeps up the pious breathings and fervor of true devotion. When our Lord recommends to his followers *importunity* in prayer, how does he enforce it? Not by complimenting their natural ability, but by shewing them their need of supernatural influence. *Work out your own salvation*, saith the scripture, *with fear and trembling*; but know this, moreover, that of yourselves you are insufficient, not only for *doing* but even for *willing* what is right; *for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his own good pleasure*.—In short, this principle of renovation is become to man in his present state indispensably necessary; and such a disposition as that which is effected by it is equitably and strictly required. Possessed of this, we have a preservative from all essential mistakes; and in proportion as we *do the will of God* (other things being equal) *we shall know whether a doctrine be of God, or of men*; and, by parity of reason, what is the  
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the true system of the bible, and the most important parts of it. — We are now led,

III. To examine the *Influence* of religious practice on theological enquiries. Our present concern is not about natural and political, but moral and spiritual truth; the real system of Christianity. All truth is valuable; but the knowledge of natural truths may subsist in a high degree, without a spark of virtue, and solid happiness. From “sublime speculations which have astonished and illuminated the world,” we cannot infer that the *eye is single, and the whole body full of light*. Persons may be wonderful proficient in philosophy and politics, while utter strangers to genuine theology\*; may be “*heroes of science, champions of truth, of liberty and virtue,*”  
and

\* Si eam (scil. theologiam sacram, sive inspiratam) tractare pergamus, exeundum nobis e navicula rationis humanæ, et transeundum in Ecclesiæ Navem, quæ sola *Acu nautica divina* pollet, ad cursum recta dirigendum. Neque enim, sufficient amplius *Stellæ Philosophiæ*, quæ hactenus præcipue nobis affulserunt. BACON, *Ut supra*.

and yet deny the Lord that bought them.—  
*If any man will do God's will, he shall know of the Christian doctrine; he shall know the truth, and it shall make him free—but let no other flatter himself that he has any real acquaintance with divine truth.*

Here, then, we might safely lodge an appeal with any impartial and competent judge, respecting the point in issue. Who are the persons, among those to whom a revelation from heaven is *first* proposed, most likely to receive and understand it? They who wilfully and habitually shut their eyes against the light they have, or they who are most conscientious in attending to it? Who are the persons, among those to whom a *partial* revelation has been given, best qualified to understand and approve a subsequent revelation? They who humbly, gratefully, and diligently improve former truths, promises and precepts, encouragements and threatenings, or they who act a contrary part? Who are the persons,  
among

among those who enjoy the *last* display of mercy, we might reasonably expect to obtain a just and consistent knowledge of the doctrine of God, as a general system, or in its most interesting parts? They who are intoxicated with sensual pleasures, immersed in worldly pursuits, swollen with pride, and panting after fame; or the temperate, the humble, the unassuming? The men of Laodicean spirit, "who are *most indifferent* to the practice of religion," or the men who are *fervent in spirit, serving the Lord*? To what description of men was the promise made of the Messiah's benign influences? Jehovah himself replies: *To you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.* Who receives an additional talent, he who buries the one entrusted to him, or he who improves it? The rule is decisive: *To him that bath shall be given, but from him that bath not shall be taken away that which he thinketh he bath.* In a word, who bids fairest to know the true analogy of faith, and the general tendency of reveal-



ed truth; that invaluable golden thread which runs through the whole of its texture; from what source of authority or mercy the several parts flow, and what is their genuine effect? Our Lord solves the interesting question: *He who doeth the will of God.*—It is manifest that what I have been now advancing refers to the order of means, and the moral dependence of causes and effects, and not to the procedure of sovereignty. As a sovereign, God is superior to means; and it would be easy to produce numerous instances, in which the current of nature, though very strong against the truth, has been turned out of its channel by a sovereign hand. Instantaneously, and in defiance of all attempts to the contrary, the most prejudiced mind has been conquered, and made the sacred receptacle of truth and goodness.—But what I all along refer to, is, not how men come by rectified dispositions, but what is the genuine tendency of certain dispositions and habits towards moral truth.

Now

Now reflect, my brethren, is it probable that *they* should be successful in their choice, when truth and real good are proposed to them, who are accustomed to disregard the *promise* and the oath of Jehovah? After all the condescending and wonderful steps taken to engage our reception of free promises of pardon, peace and salvation out of the *unsearchable riches of Christ*; is it likely, while we remain *indifferent* to these, that we should be competent judges of gospel doctrines at large? Is it to be supposed that the Jews, had they received the promises as Abraham did, would have rejected Christ and his doctrine?—The fact is, that when the fault lies in the *disposition* and *habits* of the mind, the heart is deceived. All the mental powers, however sublime and comprehensive in natural knowledge, are morally corrupted. And when that is the case, the greatest wisdom may appear folly, and the most glorious truths mean and contemptible. *For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing*

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*the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe †.*

All revelation, my brethren, is a doctrine according to godliness. And the character of the whole must belong to the several parts. Proceeding from God, and the effect of his infinite wisdom and benevolence, its general aim must needs be conformable to these perfections. Whatever else it aims at, we are sure this must be one—to make us *holy* as well as happy; both in this world and to eternal ages. Whatever tends to overturn this maxim, tends to overturn the doctrine of God, to undermine the very foundations of Christianity. Now I assert, that in proportion as a man's practice is not according to godliness, or, which

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is the same thing, continues "indifferent to the practice of religion," he is not qualified to pass a right judgment upon Christianity. Not accustomed to do the will of God which is holy, and which requires holiness in all manner of conversation, how is it possible for him to *embrace* the truth which flashes *condemnation* into his conscience?

Let us appeal to experience. Every one knows that *acts* of any kind repeated, introduce *habits* of the same kind. Irreligious acts, therefore, repeated and persisted in, form irreligious habits. I appeal to your consciences, you who are reclaimed from the dominion of these habits, for the truth of this remark. You can easily apply it to a thousand facts; particularly to prayer being restrained, and meditation on the scriptures omitted; to bodily indulgence, and the repetition of sensual gratifications; and especially *indifference* towards God. The omission of duty being grown into a habit, it is but an easy step to slight transgressions;

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transgressions; and from repeated commissions of these less notorious sins, a habit is forming for those that are presumptuous.

Moreover: when habits are established by practice, they necessarily beget a class of *prejudices* in favour of those habits. The mind of man is ever active. The passions in no stage of life, nor in any situation, are free from interest and attachment. If freed from one object, it is because they are engaged to another. To suppose any person, be his education, sentiments, or line of life what they may, to be *indifferent* to moral objects, is contrary to fact, and a solecism in morals. If men, therefore, are not religious in their practice and habits, indifferent to the principles of religious truth they cannot be. Deliberate habitual human conduct is a stream which proceeds from the state of the heart; and as the stream is, such is the fountain. Then alone is the tone of the mind in unison with truth and virtue,  
when

when productive of virtuous and religious practice. He who committeth sin, habitually, is *the servant of sin*. And he cannot serve two masters; if he love the one and serve him, he must needs offend the other. But can any one be the servant of sin, without being disaffected, in the same degree, to truth and holiness? And how can he embrace that, to which he is at the same time disaffected? In a word, how is it possible for a man to serve sin—by being disaffected to objects of infinite magnitude and eternal consequence, but active enough towards those which are comparatively trifling—and not be an enemy to Christ and his gospel? He who *gathereth not with Christ, scattereth abroad*. If no active friend to religion and goodness, it is because he is already biassed to evil. And every one that doeth evil, *hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd*. If men's deeds are evil, is it any wonder that they love darkness rather than light, error in preference to truth?



In proportion, therefore, as any doctrine is of a *reforming* tendency, it will be *bated* by the evil-doer. The system he has erected, (for evil-doers have their systems) the system he has erected is in danger of being undermined; and the defence of his acquired habits is become self-defence. His prejudices are alarmed, and stand prepared to oppose the doctrine which offers to disturb those indulged habits. — Wherefore, let him who would reform his habits, begin with reforming those acts which beget and support them; let him — attentive to his past crimes, and the depravity of his heart, and to that mercy which is higher than the heavens — *break off his sins by repentance, and his iniquities by turning to the Lord.* Let him *put away the evil of his doings, cease to do evil, and learn to do well.* Till this is laid as the foundation of our enquiries, our superstructure will be deformed and unsafe; and our speculations about divine truth will remain covered with impenetrable darkness.

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On the contrary, he who *doeth the will of God* shall succeed in his enquiries. His devout regard to the divine will in repeated acts, begets a habit of propriety and goodness. Whenever truth is proposed to such a person, his mind will fall in love with it. Truth incorporates itself in his mind, and nourishes what it did not produce. Being a suitable mean, it will *improve* a good disposition, though it cannot give it existence. Before any one does, in fact, render acceptable obedience, his heart must be virtuously disposed; for the deed is of the nature of the disposition. Hence it necessarily follows, that the disposition, or the radical state of the heart, and the acquired habits, proceed from *different* sources. The latter take their rise from actions, the former flows directly from the eternal source of good. Truth will not, never did nor can, form the first principle of goodness and virtue in the heart, by any "native energy" of its own, any more than precious seed will alter the nature of the soil; or, than a scion

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engrafted on a stock will alter its nature. Food, when received by a living body, prolongs life and imparts vigour; but can food beget a faculty of digesting in a body which has lost it? What the apostle says of the *law*, is equally applicable to *truth*—it is become *weak through the flesh*. The *gracious* man, and he alone, *doeth truth*; and therefore he alone *cometh to the light*.

Be not deceived, *evil communications corrupt good manners*. He who doeth not God's will, is, for that very reason, prepared for rejecting every doctrine which enjoins purity. He whose practice is carnal, has a carnal mind; and you know who hath said, that the *carnal mind is enmity against God*; it is *not subject to the law of God*, (nor, for the same reason, qualified to receive his gospel) *nor indeed can be*, being *spiritually discerned*.—Look to him, therefore, who caused the *light to shine out of darkness*, that he may shine into your minds, and give you the light of the *knowledge of the glory of God in the face*,



*face, that is, in the Person, of Jesus Christ, who is the resplendent image of the invisible God. Your mind is darkened, being alienated from the life of God, till the Holy Spirit of promise shew you the truth as it is in Jesus. Flesh and blood, human nature unrenewed, cannot help you to this necessary knowledge, to any saving purpose, notwithstanding all the helps of men and books in the world. And as your understanding is darkened, so your will is disinclined to evil, till you are made willing in the day of God's power. While your heart is a heart of stone, and not a heart of flesh, what impression can be made upon it? But the God of grace can give you a happy exchange; and when he puts his fear and his love in your hearts, with what affection, humility, and meekness will you receive the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls! While the pride of native power and dignity remains unsubdued, prejudices are vigilant, the passions are roused, at the very mention of the doctrine of the cross; but when*

it is given you, on the behalf of Christ, to believe, a crucified Redeemer, delivered for your offences and raised again for your justification, will appear, as indeed he is, *the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*

Thus we have attempted to explain the text, and to enforce the doctrine of it. Nothing I believe has been dropped, I am sure nothing was intended, to damp the spirit of free enquiry, but the general aim was rather to promote it. But as *method* is essential to success, it behoves all concerned (and who is not concerned?) to fix upon the best. Wisdom itself has condescended to point it out, and fruitless must be the toil of those who neglect it.—From the whole we may infer,

*First,* The great importance of religious practice. To know the truth is a great privilege, but to practise what we know is our blessedness: *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.* On the importance of religious principles it is the  
office

office of a Christian minister frequently to insist. He cannot expect, a future crop of holiness and usefulness while he neglects to sow good seed; but if these principles do not prove operative, if knowledge be not reduced to affection and practice, the Christian character is but half formed. Practice is the *end* of all revealed truths. What is the end, for instance, of scripture *facts*? While they demand the assent of the understanding, they also claim the exercise of the moral feelings. Does any thing bear the mark of mistake in judgment, or impropriety in human conduct? It was recorded to excite caution, diffidence, humble prayer, and gratitude to him who makes us differ. Its language is, *Be not high minded, but fear. Let him who thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.* Is any human character pointed out as praise-worthy? It is not to extort a transient admiration of it, but that we, as circumstances allow, may go and do likewise. *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever*



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*soever things are lovely,, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things; that is, revolve them in your mind, with an endeavour to acquire and practise them. If infinite mercy condescends to address us in promises, it is not that we may only speculate upon them, but that we may believe them. Are the counsels of love opened, and the riches of grace displayed? It is that we may adore, love, and obey. Does God add oaths to promises, and his seal to both? It is to encourage our access to him, to make us a willing, a grateful, and obedient people. When laws are given us, as the subjects of God's moral government, is it merely that we may know, or is it not chiefly that we may obey them? He who knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.*

To speculate about religious truth, if unattended with holiness of heart and life, is to look for good seed, while neglecting

lecting the choice of soil, and the labour of cultivation. Vain the depth of philosophic researches, and the pomp of eloquence; vain the flight of genius, and the pride of science; vain are elaborate investigations of truth itself while the practice of piety is neglected. Baffled will be every effort. Criticism may surprise us with learned ingenuity, or metaphysical subtlety with plausible hypothesis; but the enquirer, if not a doer of the will of God, will have no greater security against *moral error* than the most illiterate mechanic. Let this be firmly rooted in our minds, on the authority of Christ, and as perfectly consistent with reason and fact, that a compliance with the will of heaven in *plain* things, is the safest way in which a religious enquirer can travel. Next to the promised *unction from the Holy One*, it is the surest guide to the more sacred recesses of the temple of divine truth\*.

—This leads me to remark,

*Finally,*

\* I beg leave to insert and recommend here the following plain but expressive language of Dr. RALPH CUD-

WORTH,

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*Secondly*, and to conclude, How amiable are the divine goodness and equity in fixing on the practice of what we know as a clue to truth and to happiness! Mortifying it may be to human pride, but is matter of eternal thankfulness to the pious poor and

WORTH, the celebrated author of "The true Intellectual System of the Universe:" "We have much enquiry concerning knowledge in these latter times. The sons of Adam are now as busy as ever himself was about the *tree of knowledge* of good and evil, shaking the boughs of it, and scrambling for the fruit: whilst, I fear, many are too unmindful of the *tree of life*.—There be many that speak of new discoveries of *truth*, of dawnings of gospel-light; and no question but God hath reserved much of this for the very evening and sun-set of the world, for *in the latter days knowledge shall be increased*: but yet I wish, whilst we talk of *light* and dispute about *truth*, we could walk more as *children of the light*.—If St. John's rule here [1 John, ii. 3, 4.] be good, we must not judge of our *knowing* of Christ by our skill in books and papers, but by our *keeping his commandments*.—The greatest part of the world, whether learned or unlearned, think, that there is no need of purging and *purifying their hearts*, for the *right knowledge* of Christ and his gospel; but though their lives be never so wicked, their hearts never so foul within, yet they may know Christ sufficiently out of their treatises and discourses—although our Saviour prescribed his disciples another method to come



and unlearned. *I thank thee, O Father, says Christ, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight* \*. Thus also the apostle of the Gentiles expresses himself:

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For

\* Matt. xi. 25, 26.

come to the right knowledge of divine truths, by doing of God's will; *He that will do my Father's will (saith he) shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.*—Christ came not to possess our brains only with some cold opinions, that send down nothing but a freezing and benumbing influence upon our hearts. He is the best Christian whose heart beats with the truest pulse towards heaven;—not he whose head spinneth out the finest cobwebs.—I wish it were not the distemper of our times, to make men solicitous about this and that opinion, whilst in the mean time there is no care taken about keeping Christ's commandments, and being renewed in our minds according to the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness.

“ It was well spoken by a noble philosopher, *Without virtue, God is an empty NAME*: so without obedience to Christ's commandments, without the life of Christ dwelleth in us, whatsoever opinions we entertain of him, Christ is only *named* by us, he is not *known*. I speak not here against a free and ingenuous enquiry into all truth, according to our several abilities and opportunities; I plead not for the enthralling our judgments

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For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise—THAT NO FLESH SHOULD GLORY IN HIS PRESENCE †. Amen.

† 1 Cor. i. 26, 27, 29.

judgments to the dictates of men; I do not disparage the natural improvement of our understanding by true knowledge: but the thing I aim against is, the *dispiriting* the life and vigour of our religion by dry speculations, and making it nothing but a mere dead skeleton of opinions—and misplacing all our zeal upon these, which should be spent to better purpose upon other objects. *Knowledge* indeed is a thing far more excellent than riches, outward pleasures, worldly dignities, or any thing else besides holiness; but yet our happiness consisteth not in it, but in a divine temper and constitution of soul which is far above it. But it is a piece of that corruption that runneth through human nature, that we naturally prize *knowledge* more than *holiness*. We think it a gallant thing to be fluttering up to heaven with our wings of knowledge and speculation: whereas the highest mystery of a divine life here, and of perfect happiness hereafter, consisteth in nothing but mere obedience to the divine will. Happiness is nothing but that inward sweet delight that will arise from the harmonious agreement between our wills and God's will. There is nothing contrary to God in the whole world, nothing that fights against him, but SELF-WILL." Dr. CUDWORTH'S *Sermon*, preached before the House of Commons.

APPENDIX;  
CONTAINING  
A FRIENDLY LETTER  
ADDRESSED TO  
THE REV. MR. BELSHAM.





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## A LETTER, &c.

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Concerning the Nature, comparative Excellence, and Influence of TRUTH.

§ 1. *Introduction.* § 2. *The subject stated.* § 3. *TRUTH what. The proper nature of revealed truth is that of a MEAN to virtue and happiness.* § 4. *Which Mr. B. grants, by making it an object of choice.* § 5—7. *But his further account of truth is, 1. Inconsistent with that LIBERTY which is essential to accountable agents, and God's moral government.* § 8—10. *2. Inconsistent with the superior excellence and peculiar office of GOODNESS, in rendering means efficacious.* § 11—13. *3. Inconsistent with the scripture doctrine of DIVINE INFLUENCE, as the only true source of virtue and happiness.* § 14. *Recapitulation.*

Rev. and Dear Sir,

§ 1. **F**OR writing to a gentleman who has shewn himself to the publick as an able advocate for “The Importance

Importance of Truth, and the Duty of making an open Profession of it," it may be deemed a sufficient apology, that the writer professes himself to be a *lover of truth*, and, according to his humble ability, a defender of it. While I approve and admire many things in the Discourse alluded to, I discover, or think that I discover, several things which are *injurious* to truth. We both profess to have the same *general* end in view—"to inculcate a *proper* love of truth, and an habitual regard to it, to excite an ardent thirst after it, impartiality, and unremitting diligence in the investigation of it, courage in professing it, firmness, and fortitude in adhering to it†." And I am persuaded that a free discussion, conducted with a becoming temper of mind, will always be serviceable, eventually, to the cause of truth. A friendly collision of thoughts may cause a spark of truth to shew itself, which might otherwise have remained invisible.—I am sorry now to add, that the *objectionable* parts

† Serm. p. 1.



parts referred to are, in my apprehension, of no small moment.

§ 2. Not to insist on your *Athanasian*\* creed; your representation of "*bonesty*" as a poor simple thing; your bold assertion that God "created a countless multitude of percipient and intelligent beings, for *no other purpose*, than to display his benevolence, and to make them happy;" your severe reflections on the *Assembly's*

\* "And there seems to be a plausible presumption in favour of that pleasing hypothesis which some benevolent speculatists have advanced, that the earth may in process of time revert to its original paradisaical state, and that as the comforts of human life will be multiplied, and its evils diminished, the limits of it will be proportionably extended, so that they have even ventured to express some faint expectation that *death* itself may be *annihilated*. Nor would it be difficult to shew, if this were a proper time and place, that the scriptures themselves are not unfavourable to this amiable speculation." This account which, for an obvious reason, I call an *athanasian* creed, appears to me far less worthy of belief than the *established* one: only, it must be confessed, it has no *damnatory* clause, and therefore may be deemed harmless, though "visionary in the extreme."

*Assembly's Catechism* †, a system that has not only gained the admiration of the Reformed

† “Native goodness of heart, the beauty, order and happiness which prevail in the world, and the whole strain and tenor of the New Testament, which uniformly teaches that God is love, all contradict and abate the influence of that *terrible doctrine*, that *all mankind are by the fall brought into* and left to perish in a *state of sin and misery*, excepting the happy few whom God has out of his mere good pleasure, *selected to everlasting life*. (ASSEMBLY'S Catechism.) But so far as such principles are believed, and practically regarded, they naturally tend to *contract* the heart, to *sour* the temper, to inspire *dread* and *hatred* of God, and to disquiet the mind with the most *formidable* and *distressing* apprehensions.” (p. 30.) Query: Can we suppose that a person who writes thus *ever understood*, or felt the *genuine influence* of the system here opposed? We are here reminded of the sentiments and experience of a venerable body of Christian Bishops: “As the godly consideration of predestination, and our election in Christ, is full of *sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort* to *godly* persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things: as well because it doth greatly establish, and confirm their faith of eternal salvation to be enjoyed through Christ; as because it doth *servently kindle their love towards God*: so for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's





which I must object, as being, if I mistake not, radical parts of your view of truth. They do not indeed appear directly to lessen its *importance*, though, in my view, they greatly misrepresent it—by making it destructive of that *liberty* which is essential to accountable agents, and God's moral government, while acting otherwise than as a *moral mean*; by assigning it an office which does not belong to it, and

But are not *half-thinking* minds *accountable* for their actions as well as others, and liable to endless punishment if perverted to infidelity, and rivetted in vice? Or is the *injury* done to these individuals, by pernicious principles, the less *in itself* because the wisdom of Heaven over-rules it for the good of others?

“ A man *ought* without hesitation to *avow* pernicious principles, if he *thinks* them of sufficient importance!” A maxim this without any foundation in *reason*, and subversive of morals; a proposition highly affronting to the dignity of *truth*! If a man's principles *are* pernicious, he *ought to think* them to be so; to deny this, is to deny all moral obligation. And if he *ought to think* them to be so, he *ought not* to publish them. Again; when a man *deems* any principles to be *true* and important, while in reality they are *false* and pernicious, he *deems* them to be *what they are not*, and therefore

and which is peculiar to *goodness*, viz. the rendering of means *efficacious* in forming the moral character; and, finally, by putting it to militate against the only true source of virtue and happiness, which is the *divine influence*. The first, I apprehend, is inimical to the foundation of moral philosophy, the second greatly affects the superstructure of it, and the third is, in its just consequences, subversive of the whole system of Christian

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theology.

therefore it is impossible for him to have *clear ideas* in forming a judgment of them; consequently, he judges *without evidence*. But are crude notions formed without evidence, pernicious weapons thus forged *in the dark*, to be thrown among men to their eternal danger, and the perpetrator be *blameless* in the presence of the just and holy Judge? Or does it follow, that because his fellow mortals have *no right* to controul him in these matters, that he *ought* to do them mischief? — Besides, the above principle is contradicted by Mr. B. himself: “No principle can be more absurd than this — that speculative errors are of *little* consequence. A man’s views and principles have a *necessary influence* upon his volitions; volitions produce actions, &c.—*error*, in proportion as it prevails, will *debase* the character.” (p. 25.) How then can it be said that “no material injury has ever yet resulted from — the publication of the most dangerous tenets?”

theology. It will now be expected that I should produce my evidence from your discourse of its containing these principles, and then to shew that they are chargeable with the tendencies I have now ascribed to them.

§ 3. TRUTH, in the most general and comprehensive import of the word, is—*That which is conformable to fact.* Hence those beings, properties, and relations; those ideas, propositions, and declarations are *true* which are *conformable to fact.* Truth is *essential* to God, because of his infinite knowledge and integrity; hence it is said that he “*cannot lie.*” When he, therefore, forms a proposition, or makes a declaration, we may be sure that such is *conformable to fact*; or, that his expressions (whether in words or conduct) perfectly correspond with the reality of the things expressed. Now all divine revelation, as such, is nothing else than a number of *propositions* infinitely conformable to the reality of things, addressed to men with the *merciful* and  
*legislative*



*legislative* design of their becoming virtuous and happy; and in proportion as any *contradict* these propositions, either by thoughts, words, or actions, they contradict infinite *truth*, and give the lie to the *reality of things*. They declare some things to have existence, which have none; and deny existence to other things which have it. And on the contrary, in proportion as any *accedes* to those propositions in heart and life—in *thought, affection, word, and conduct*—he sets to his seal *that God is TRUE*; he becomes virtuous and happy.—From the premises it follows, that the proper nature of *revealed truth* is that of a perfect MEAN to virtue and happiness.

§ 4. What I have now advanced—that revealed truth is only a *mean* to virtue and happiness—is, in fact, by yourself granted: “If man be intended for future existence, and if it be the object of religion to *teach us how to attain* final happiness, it cannot be denied that just views of religious truth are of the utmost consequence.”

consequence." And indeed the very terms employed by you throughout, such as *doctrine, principles, system, &c.* to be *embraced, believed, judged of, &c.* shew, not only that revealed truth is an *object without us*, and therefore has a real subsistence, an invariable permanency, independent of our conceptions; but also, that it is an object to be *improved*. You allow that we are to "judge of its comparative excellence," and to use it as what is calculated to improve our character and promote our happiness, and that "all who embrace just and scriptural principles of religion *ought* to excel the rest of mankind in piety and virtue." — It may be thought singular that any proof is adduced for a point so plain; but plain as it may appear to some, your whole system, as I shall presently shew, is built upon a virtual denial of it. For,

§ 5. 1. Your further account of truth is inconsistent with that LIBERTY of choice which is essential to accountable agents, and God's moral government. You say,  
that

that "truth will gradually make its way by its *native energy*, and will in the end rise superior to every prejudice;" and again, "A man's views and principles have a *necessary* influence upon his volitions — from good principles, good actions, valuable habits, and virtuous characters *naturally* take rise; from erroneous principles the reverse." That is, according to the obvious import of this language, and the general tenor of the discourse, truth will act upon the mind *mechanically*, and it will not be in a man's power to resist its evidence. And this effect follows upon those whose "irregular conduct had disgraced their principles." But it is contrary to *experience* that truth will produce any effects but according to the *disposition* with which it is received; and produce the disposition itself it cannot, except it be at once the *means* and the *subject* of conviction; which is the same as to say, that truth sown in the mind is both the seed and the soil.



§ 6. We have before seen, and you have granted, that revealed truth is only a mean to a higher end; but the very idea of a *mean*, in connection with a rational agent, implies that it is *frustrable*. If the human mind be not so free as to be capable of frustrating all means, *as such*, there is no ground left for its *accountableness*. That there is a necessity of consequence I readily grant; but yet maintain, that human liberty, in reference to *means*, is the *sole* foundation why man is accountable for his actions. Necessity is the appointment of God as a Sovereign; but liberty belongs to man as a subject of moral government only, and is essential to a state of trial. Without *necessity* of consequence God is no Sovereign over the systems he hath formed; and without *freedom* in the creature to use or abuse *all means* whatever, *as such*, be they ever so glorious and powerful, God is no moral Governor. But since he is the blessed Sovereign of all worlds, he cannot fail to render all events infallibly certain; and since he is the equitable

equitable Governor of all his moral subjects, all the moral means he employs *may* prove ineffectual. Every degree of *certainty*, with respect to *moral* event, is the product of absolute sovereign acts, and not, properly speaking, of any means. It therefore follows, that truth, which is only a *mean* to promote a higher moral end, will not, can not act *necessarily* on the mind, but in proportion as it is *sovereignly predisposed*. But those whose "irregular conduct disgrace their principles," are not predisposed to give truth a favourable reception, except we say, that vice is a preparation for virtue, or that enmity to real good disposes the mind to goodness. Consequently, "truth *will not* gradually make its way by its *native energy*, and *will not* in the end rise superior to every prejudice," to any assignable certainty, without a *sovereign act* of God, superior to all *means* whatever.

§ 7. To deny this reasoning is to undermine the foundation of moral philosophy. For all ethicks are built upon the supposition, that happiness is *certainly*

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*attainable*

*attainable* by a moral agent, for happiness is the *end* of ethicks; and, that the subject of this practical science is *accountable*, that is to say, *free*, absolutely free, as far as *means* go, either to improve or misimprove them. But to say that the mind is *free* with respect to all means, and yet that happiness is *certainly attainable*, which constitute the foundation of morals, involves a contradiction, if the intervention of *sovereign acts*, superior to all mechanism of means, be not admitted. — I therefore conclude, that your representation of truth is inconsistent with that *liberty* which is essential to accountable creatures, incompatible with God's moral government, and inimical to the very foundation of moral philosophy.

§ 8. 2. But your account of truth is further inconsistent with the superior excellence and peculiar office of GOODNESS in rendering means efficacious. While you represent it as producing in a vicious mind, by its "native energy," the primary good disposition, you assign it an office which



which it is impossible for it to discharge. That it is adapted in its own nature to *improve* the mind, to *promote* virtue and happiness, when the *disposition* is capacitated to employ it for that purpose, is readily granted from its very nature as a *mean*; but, except we argue in a circle, we must further enquire, How comes the mind by that capacity of disposition? Truth, from its nature, being an object held forth by the equitable governor of the world to solicit men's approbation; and the human mind, from its very accountableness, being free to embrace or to reject this object; what can it be that *secures* it success? Let truth be *clearly* proposed to men, and confirmed by the most astonishing miracles; will this produce conviction if the mind be not *predisposed* to improve it? If not, as innumerable scripture facts prove, what becomes of truth's "native energy" to overcome prejudices? Why do not the sublime truths of revelation convince those who daily read the scriptures, and who profess the firmest attachment to

the Christian revelation? How many are there, who, notwithstanding their opportunities of information, and their embracing the scriptures as divine, are utter strangers to their efficacious influence and genuine tendency? How does not the mechanical energy of truth overpower the prejudices, hypocrisy, uncharitableness, covetousness, luxury, and sloth of its professors? Is the fault in the *truth itself*, or in the disposition? Not in the truth itself; for *that* is always the same, consisting of propositions infinitely true, which, like their author, *know no variableness neither shadow of change*. It remains then that the fault lies in the *badness* of the disposition; the truth falls on stony ground, among thorns, or on the trodden path. It is therefore the peculiar office of *goodness*, as a subjective quality, to render truth efficacious in the mind.

§ 9. "Happiness, you say, is the great end of intellectual existence; and it is obvious that truth is the *only safe guide* to happiness. — Properly speaking, vice  
itself

itself *originates in error.*" Happiness, indeed, is the great end of intellectual existence; but *truth* is not, *of itself*, capable of leading the erroneous and the disaffected to enjoy happiness, any more than the gladsome light of day is capable of leading the blind in a right path to the end of his journey. Without a *previous* principle of goodness in the mind, truth can have no existence there, because nothing else can properly discern and embrace it. To suppose otherwise is no less absurd than if I should say, that the objects of sense, as the moon, a rose, an apple, a bell, or a ball, are the proper cause of animal *life* as well as the instruments of *sensation*. And for a *moral mean*, as truth is, to operate *mechanically* is contradiction in terms. — Besides, the *immediate* effect of truth, when rightly improved, is not happiness, but goodness. For suppose truth to exist in the mind in any assignable form, if it is not improved for the purpose of promoting universal goodness, no happiness will be attained, except what is delusive. Good-  
ness



ness of disposition, therefore, is the "only safe guide," first to truth, and then to happiness. Truth may *advance*, as a mean, a virtuous disposition and the sum of happiness, when rightly used; but it is the province of sovereign benevolence to produce the one, and to confer the other.

§ 10. Nor again does vice "*originate* in error," if by error we understand any object of choice, as the *reverse* of truth; *evil* under the semblance of good, or the *wrong mean* of happiness. Error may increase both vice and misery, but does not generate the *first vice*, any more than truth can generate the first virtue. There must be therefore a defection of another nature than any that error can effect, to give the *first error* admission. Error presented to a mind qualified and disposed to resist its influence, has no bad effect, as appears from Christ's temptations. All vice, and all success of error, therefore, *originates* in the *previous state* of the mind. Nor does this imply any unbecoming reflection on the Author of our nature.

For

For it must be owned that *defectibility* is *essential* to an accountable agent, as such; therefore, *certain perseverance* in virtue, or a *restoration* of it when lost, are equally the effect of *sovereign* favour, and not of mere *equity*, or, for the same reason, of any moral means whatever. And to relax or suspend that act of sovereignty, for the very reason that it is *sovereign*, is not requisite on the ground of *equity* in the moral Governor. This defectibility, therefore, is a sufficient *source* (and indeed is the only one) of evil, prior to the entrance of error. I say that this defectibility is *essential* to a created nature in a state of probation; for what can possibly constitute its *accountableness* but its *liableness* to *deviate* from *rectitude*, (without a sovereign prevention) as well as to *preserve* it? And when ignorance has once invaded the mind, no *means* in the universe can enlighten it of themselves; whether revealed facts, miracles, example, or any thing else. He alone who "commanded the light to shine out of darkness," by an act of mere sovereignty,

reignty, can restore the capacity for receiving and improving goodness and truth. "The *pursuit* of happiness by wrong means, and the *choice* of evil under the semblance of good," are undoubtedly vicious; but what is it that sets the mind upon *pursuing* these wrong means? Is it a perfect or a vicious mind that *begins* this pursuit? If vicious, then vice exists there without the choice of error; if perfect, (and alas! in vain do we look for such in our world) how comes evil to appear good? — I therefore conclude, that your account of truth is inconsistent with the superior excellence and peculiar office of *goodness* in rendering means efficacious. — Nor is this all, for,

§ 11. 3. Your doctrine concerning truth is inconsistent, moreover, with the scripture doctrine of *divine influence*, as the true cause *immediately* of goodness, and *efficiently* of virtue and happiness. What you ascribe to *human* mechanical skill in the philosophy of mind, whereby the force of truth is happily applied to the  
 mental



mental machine, the scriptures impute to the immediate influence of God's *Holy Spirit*. According to you, it is *philosophy* "which teaches man to know himself, to form a just estimate of the dignity [and why not also the present *depravity*?] of his nature, of his high and happy destination, to number and to measure his intellectual powers, to calculate their strength, to direct their exertions, and to carry them to the highest state of possible improvement — which opens to view the hidden sources of knowledge — which reveals the subtle movements of the intellectual machine, the laws which it obeys, and those secret springs which with invariable certainty regulate all its motions; and which, if *skilfully touched*, will, as by an irresistible charm, produce the regular harmonious movements of the whole, and carry it on in a steady and unerring course to *virtue*, to honour, to ultimate, complete, interminable *happiness*." The holy scriptures, on the contrary, declare, that *the inspiration of the*

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*Almighty*

*Almighty giveth understanding\**, or true knowledge of God and his dispensations; that we become virtuous by being *born of the spirit* †, or changed by his agency; that we are *begotten* to virtue and happiness, by the sovereign pleasure of *the father of lights* ||; that it is the Lord who giveth to some, in a distinguishing manner, *an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear* †; that *a man can receive nothing*, in a religious sense, *except it be given him from heaven*, as a matter of sovereign favour \*\*; that we are *saved by grace, through faith*, as *the gift of God*\*; that the truly virtuous are *born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God* †; that we are *saved by the renewing of the Holy Ghost* †; that it is the work of the Lord God to dispose the *heart to love him that we may live* ||; that virtuous persons are the *divine workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works*

\* Job xxxii. 8. † John iii. 3, 7. || James i. 17, 18.

† Deut. xxix. 4. \*\* John iii. 27. \* Eph. ii. 8.

† John i. 13. † Tit. iii. 5. || Deut. xxx. 6.

*works \*\*; that it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure §; that true Christians are chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth ††; that love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance, are the fruit of the Spirit ‡‡. And indeed, some of the wiser Heathens were constrained to own that the source of virtue was purely divine; that it is neither capable of being taught, nor to be acquired by science; that it comes not from nature, any more than from instruction; but, proceeding from divine inspiration, it is communicated to the virtuous without the instrumentality of their understanding §§; that every virtuous action originates in God\* ; that there is no mind*

*M 2 truly*

\*\* Eph. ii. 10. § Phil. ii. 13. †† 2 Thes. ii. 13.

‡‡ Gal. v. 22, 23.

§§ Ου διδάσκει σὸν ἐδ' ἐπιστήμη δὲ ἐπιγίγνηται ἡ ἀρετή. Ἀρετὴ αὐτὴ οὐκ ἐστὶν οὐδὲ διδάσκει ἀλλὰ θεὸς αὐτὴν παραγίγνηται αὐτοῖς αὐτὴν παραγίγνηται. SOCRATES apud PLAT. in *Men.*

\* Τὸ αὐτὸ ἀγαθὸν πράττειν οὐκ ἐστὶν ἀναγκαστικόν. BIAS, apud LAERT.



truly virtuous without divine aid†; and that we are bound to believe no virtuous man becomes such, but by the special help of God‡.

§ 12. But while heathens, with their glow-worm light, ascribe all real virtue to a divine influence; and while revelation, with its meridian brightness, discovers, that the source of all virtue and happiness is the discriminating agency of our heavenly Father, who has promised to give his *Holy Spirit* to them who ask him; it may be shewn, if I mistake not, with demonstrative evidence, that if there be any such thing as virtue in our world it must be derived from a higher source than the mechanical power of truth, whether “philosophical, political, or theological.” And though we grant that the *particulars* and the *circumstances* of

† Nulla sine Deo mens bona est. *SENeca. Epist. lxxli.*

‡ Et nostra civitas et Græcia tulit singulares viros, quorum neminem nisi juvante Deo talem fuisse credendum est. *CICERO. De Nat. Deor. Lib. ii. § 66. Glasg. 1748.*

of this doctrine are to be learned from revelation; yet we maintain, in opposition to those who imagine that we have no other foundation for it than a mistaken interpretation of the sacred oracles, that the necessity of its existence is founded in reason, and is as capable of demonstration as most points in moral philosophy. For,

1. The evil of *imperfect existence* is essential to every creature; except we should say, that self-existence is no perfection; or hold a contradiction in terms, that the want of absolute perfection is no imperfection. Hence our absolute dependence on the Creator for every degree of existence, and every degree of perfection. Therefore,

2. The good of *virtuous existence* is absolutely dependent on the Creator. If intelligence, and volition, and the heart itself are absolutely dependent upon God, much more do a *right* intelligence, a  
*good*

good volition, and a *virtuous* state of the heart, so depend upon him. Hence it follows,

3. That every degree, even the smallest, of virtue and happiness in creatures is a matter of *sovereign favour*, and not of equity; and, on the contrary, that every degree, even the smallest, of moral pravity in accountable agents is *equitably punishable*. But,

4. From the moment that desert of *punishment* commences, a state of *probation* expires, upon the ground of *mere equity*. For the trial of moral agents, in strict equity, is a trial of *strict rectitude* according to the moral means afforded; and when the balance is once turned to moral pravity, it is impossible, from the nature of the thing, that *equity* should ever restore it. Wherefore,

If any man becomes virtuous, who was once otherwise, it must be the effect of sovereign benevolence dispensed by way of  
of



of *supernatural influence*. For if we assert that it is dispensed in *any other* way, we shall be forced to contradict the above plain *axioms*. If any one hesitates about the truth of this remark, let him try his skill in forming an objection; or, if he prefers it, in disproving either of the principles (which I call *axioms*) themselves.

§ 13. What appears to me to be the only objection of plausibility, is this: "That the sovereign benevolence consists in affording us those *means* which, in strict equity, God was not engaged to grant; such as a revelation of mercy, righteous laws, eminent examples &c." But what are *means* to a mind ill-affected to the holy nature and immediate end of means, and which is alienated from the life of God through *ignorance*, as every one without virtue must needs be? But what utterly invalidates this objection is, that mere means are so far from being sufficient to *restore* the balance, from vice to virtue, after it is lost, that

that they are not sufficient to *preserve* it virtuous when put in *equilibrium*! (§ 11. gr. 2.) In short, I scruple not to assert, that if the doctrine of *divine supernatural influence* be not admitted, neither the entrance or even the *existence* of moral evil in the universe can be *reasonably* accounted for, nor any *rational* prospect of *deliverance* from it be shewn.

§ 14. Thus, Sir, have I presumed to submit to your consideration a few strictures on your account of Truth; as inconsistent with *liberty*, degrading to *goodness*, and injurious to *God*; and I further presume that the following language will, in your estimation, justify my conduct; “Nor will it be difficult to prove that it is the *indispensable duty* of all, as far as ability and opportunity permit, to *bear testimony to truth* by diligent enquiry after it, courageous profession of it, faithful adherence to it, and by using every fair and honourable means of promoting its progress in the world.” Nor need I request of a gentleman so devoted to  
thought

thought and reflection as yourself, a *close attention* to my arguments, in opposition to the superficial haste and premature conclusions of many readers; but what I request is, that you will receive in a *candid* and *friendly* manner my contribution of a mite towards advancing the stock of investigated truth and practical Christianity, and that you will believe me to be,

Rev. Sir,

Your sincere Wellwisher,

EDWARD WILLIAMS,

Oswestry, Feb. 1791.



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THE secret things belong to the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever. Deut. xxix. 29.



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